

Deep Layer Structure Behind Comedic Performance

— *Ah, Wilderness!* —

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Introduction

Ah, Wilderness! (1933) is considered by the critics in general as the only comedy written by Eugene O'Neill. But is this view correct? Can we just put it away saying it is just a mere comedy without questioning and studying in depth? It is a well-known fact that O'Neill is a dominant figure in the American theater and that his literary genius outstands other playwrights. The complexity of the plots of his works does not fit in the standard category. Then, is it correct to study or evaluate this play from the viewpoint of just one theatrical genre? *Ah, Wilderness!* is the work that poses such questions.

The audience is deceived by the simple and easy-to-understand plot on the surface, however, when studying in depth, *Ah, Wilderness!* can be classified as one of the most complex work of the author. The first reason is that the underlying complexity hidden in the context of the story is evidenced when viewed in relation to *Days Without End* (1934). These two plays are often compared by the critics. The play written after struggling through many drafts for many years is *Days Without End*. During the dedicated years indulging in plotting the play, which inspired him to think about the

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next play, O'Neill wrote *Ah, Wilderness!* in just about few weeks.¹⁾ As a matter of fact, the critics favored *Ah, Wilderness!*. On the contrary, although some evaluated the work highly, the efforts of taking several years of re-writing the drafts of *Days Without End* was ignored by the majority of the critics with negative review and egregious comments such as, "A bad plays written as if O'Neill had never written a play before." One of them ironically took the subtitle "A Modern Miracle Play" and said, "Nothing can make it good; true miracle is that it got produced at all."²⁾

In contrast, *Ah, Wilderness!* won a critical favor:

As a writer of comedy Mr. O'Neill has a capacity for tenderness that most of us never suspected. "Ah, Wilderness!" with which the Guild opened it's sixteenth season last evening, may not be his most tremendous play, but it is certainly his most attractive.³⁾

In spite of its dreadful title, *Ah, Wilderness!* is a true and congenial comedy. If Mr. O'Neill can write with as much clarity as this, it is hard to understand why he has held up the grim mask so long.⁴⁾

Some of the critics view *Ah, Wilderness!* as a pure comedy while others see it as the combination of tragedy and comedy or a comedy grounded with the tragic foundation or "the comedy of reminiscence".

Though the majority viewed as a pure comedy, the author illustrates the typical American family in good old days of America, that traces back his youth period in nostalgic tone as he describes the play as "It is purely a play of nostalgia for youth, a sentimental, if you likes evocation of the mood of emotion of a past time which, whatever maybe said against it, possessed a lot which we badly need today to steady us."⁵⁾ Similarly, there are views that place much emphasis on the nostalgic element of the play. As such, the play is written in a light-hearted, nostalgic mood crafting a humorous nightmare, unrivaled and unexcelled. The lines and actions of the characters, all deliver warmth and glow to the audience, who also enjoys the sweet nostalgia of the good old days of youth. Where does this mood of emotion of the past time come from? As

some of the critical reviews point out, the play represents O'Neill's fantasy of life as it might have been in his youth.⁶⁾

Those, who view the play as a combination of tragedy and comedy, point out that the scene where Nat Miller says, "Well, Spring isn't everything, is it, Essie? There's a lot to be said for Autumn. That's got beauty, too. And Winter-if you're together" (Act Four Scene Three), the graceful and charming ending with the kissing of the aged characters in the moon light, signifies the harmonious fusion of humor and *peithos*.⁷⁾ The deep insight of the play suggests that *Ah, Wilderness!* is not just the humoristic comedy but the element of *peithos* is hidden in the work and that the whole story is the representation of the merge with *peithos*. In other words, the dark shadow of *peithos* which is flowing at the depth of the play eventually merges with the humors at the ending. They positions *Ah, Wilderness!* as the important work of O'Neill in light of the fact that the play also resolves the fundamental conflict in the conscious of the character by a harmonious fusion of humor, the outer selves and *peithos*, the inner darkness.

In the third view, which considers the play as a comedy grounded with tragedy or "a comedy of reminiscence", the main argument focuses on the tragic elements, which is the author's area of expertise, that these particles are jeweled in various parts of the play that are essential to evolve the comedy.⁸⁾ The characters such as Sid, the drunkard who fails to win the love of Lily and the prostitute who uses her charm to wind her men with her little finger are a few of the examples of the serious issues which constitute the basis of the comedic plot.

Tendency to think seriously, rebellious attitude, defiant and disobedient behavior and demoralized and negative speech, all describe the main character, Richard. These attributes are typical to the characters in the tragic plays of Eugene O'Neill, which signifies that not all the characters in the comedy are humorous. In other words, the baseline of their argument is that the play incorporates the tragic elements in the base layer as the foundation of a comedy.

I argue, however, that all above three views are not sufficient to categorize this play. Issues remain if we try to categorize *Ah,*

Wilderness! into any one of these classifications. To analyze the play in full scale, we, first of all, must consider the relationship with other plays. Starting with *Dynamo* (1929), *Ah, Wilderness!* and *Days Without End*, all of these three plays are intimately related and has a deep significance in O'Neill's works.

In *Dynamo*, Reuben, the main character, embraces the belief in four gods, but commits suicide, not being able to find the answer to resolve his inner conflicts. In *Days Without End*, the main character also commits suicide in the first draft but in the eighth draft, the author allows him to live with the merge of the split characters through self-adjustment process.⁹⁾ The life given by the author to the main character represents the eternal life that is the manifestation of super-ego. In this aspect, the difference in the conclusion of *Dynamo* and *Days Without End* can only be explained through *Ah, Wilderness!* This play enabled the author to conclude the *Days Without End* in such a manner. O'Neill used the positivity of *Ah, Wilderness!* as the constructive and pragmatic element to draw the conclusion of *Days Without End*; without *Ah, Wilderness!*, there were no *Days Without End*. In this sense, this play is a tragedy in the form of comedic expression. The lines of the characters reveal their attitude and behavior that have evolved from their personal and collective conscious. In other words, the characters' conscious are dramatized using the form of expression different from other plays. All of these three plays are interactive and collaborative with one another and in this aspect, they are a "complete trilogy" and not "unfinished trilogy" of Eugene O'Neill as many critics consider. In this thesis, I would like to prove that these three plays are inter-related and form a perfect trilogy. From this reasons correlational analysis is necessary to reveal the true intent of the author. I would like to prove this in light of the Freudian, Jungian and Nietzschean analysis by studying the comedic expression from these viewpoints to have the correct understanding of the author's works and reprimand the critical misconceptions.

I. Simplicity and Clarity

Dynamo is the first play of a trilogy that the author promises to “dig at the roots of the sickness of today”. In other words, this is the play that reveals the source of the sickness found in the American soul as O’Neill feels it. The author intelligently dramatized the root cause as the conflict of modern civilization, material world vs religion.

Doubts in the religious belief started in the early years of Eugene O’Neill. His mother, Ella, accompanied his father who was a successful touring actor throughout the country but this lead her responsible for her second son’s death. At the birth of her unwanted child, Eugene O’Neill, the doctor, thoughtlessly, advised her to take morphine which evoked her drug addiction. Unable to resist the lure of drugs, she recklessly indulged in drugs to escape from the reality, ruining her spiritual health. The more she struggled to escape from the life she despised, the deeper she sank into the world of drugs. The shocking reality evolved the religious skepticism in Eugene O’Neill which resulted in his refutation of his native religion of Catholicism, which lead him to seek the answer to the question of life, what is the truth that lies in or behind the depth of human psyche.

In my previous thesis entitled, “*Dynamo—Ambiguity and Complexity*”⁽¹⁰⁾, I have pointed out that the intricacy of the plot evolves from the complication which results from the entanglement of the four gods (Puritan god, electricity god (machine god), *Dynamo* and the real god).

In *Days Without End*, we must not forget the influence of *Dynamo*. The essence of the play is projected into the *Days Without End* in the form of philosophical transition of the main character from Christian philosophy to primitive religion of the east and to multi-deity religions. In *Dynamo*, the main character Reuben shoots his lover and resumes his faith in the real god by committing suicide.

John Loving In *Days Without End*, however, seems to recover the faith in Christianity on the surface. He does not commit suicide nor did he have the fatal disease. He tries to find love and god in himself.

The complication in *Dynamo* and *Days Without End* cannot be found in *Ah, Wilderness!* The characters are described in simple manner as shown in the lines. I would like to touch on the simplicity of the play by taking some of the lines as an example. The following scene of Act Two at the dining room of Miller's reflects the simplicity of this play. Mrs. Miller and Lily are talking about marriage, and Lily insists that she is not going to marry Sid unless he gives up his drinking and flirty habits. But she dresses up waiting for Sid who promises to bring her to the fireworks event. Then, Richard enters the scene in a panic.

Richard

Do you know what I think? It's Aunt Lily's fault, Uncle Sid's going to ruin. It's all because he loves her, and she keeps him dangling after her, and eggs him on and ruins his life—like all women love to ruin men's lives!

Ah, Wilderness! Act Two

Mrs. Miller expresses her anger at Richard for his impolite manner.

Mrs. Miller

Richard, I'm ashamed of you, that's what I am.

Richard

Aw, What the hell do I care? I'll show them!

Ah, Wilderness! Act Two

Richard expresses his anger directly without keeping it to himself, quite different from Reuben (*Dynamo*) and John Loving (*Days Without End*). Richard is described as simple and straightforward person. His father, Miller, also is an uncomplicated, frank person,

apparent from his view on woman in the following lines in Act One where the father of Richard's girl friend, Muriel, rages angrily, complaining about the impertinent love letter he wrote. Miller scolds Richard but his anger is directed to Muriel's father, David in the following lines:

Miller

You better be prepared for a bit of a blow. But never mind.
There's lots of other fish in the sea.

Ah, Wilderness! Act One

Act Three and Four describes Richard in contrast to Reuben (*Dynamo*), who commits suicide. The contrasting element is apparent from the lines of his sisters Mildred, where a heartbroken Richard goes to the bar of a hotel losing hope in despair. At Miller's, his parents are worried about Richard who does not come back. Mildred comforts her mother trying to cheer her up with her comments on Richard:

Mildred

Ah, don't let him worry you, Ma. He just wants to show off
he's heart-broken about that silly Muriel—and get everyone
fussing over him and wondering if he hasn't drowned himself
or something.

Ah, Wilderness! Act Three Scene Two

From her lines, we know that Richard is not a complicated person like Reuben in *Dynamo*. The main character is drunk when he comes back home. His brother, Arthur, is angry at his attitude but Richard talks back cynically and expresses his anger with the poem in the following lines.

Richard

"Yesterday this Day's Madness did prepare
Tomorrow's Silence, Triumph, or Despair.
Drink! for --"

Ah, Wilderness! Act Three Scene Two

The 17 years old character having the youthful problems, though he later knows that his problem resulted from his misunderstanding, rebels against the society and embarks on a night of drinking and approaches a prostitute. The life of Richard is full of tragic elements. He is described as an ordinary adolescent living in the next door neighbor who is rebellious to any authority having pyrrhonian skepticism, typical to juveniles.

In Act Four, in the following scene, the two teenagers meet to resolve the misunderstanding. Richard's attitude is mean and cold at first, telling her how he suffered in pain and agony when he saw her breakup letter that he thought of killing himself.

Richard

I thought your love for me was dead. I thought you'd never loved me, that you'd only been cruelly mocking me—to torture me!

Muriel

Dick! I'd never! You know I'd never!

Richard

I wanted to die. I sat and brooded about death. Finally I made up my mind I'd kill myself.

Muriel

Dick! You didn't!If you ever had! I'd have died, too! Honest, I would!

Richard

But suicide is the act of a coward. That's what stopped me.

Ah, Wilderness! Act Four Scene Two

The main character is described as innocent and pure young man who manages to give up the suicide. His pure straight-forward

and pure-minded attitude towards love is quite differently portrayed in the play.

I have explained the complexity demonstrated in *Dynamo* and *Days Without End* vs simplicity expressed in *Ah, Wilderness!* Next, I would like to make a comparison to analyze the ambiguity found in *Dynamo* and *Days Without End* vs clarity of *Ah, Wilderness!*

In the transitional process from *Dynamo* to the real god, no distinct line is drawn to border these two gods (*Dynamo*) and their relationships are obscure.¹¹⁾ The characters are described as ambivalent and equivocal. O'Neill places the character who represents Puritanism on one hand and materialism, on the other, and creates the character who transcends these two extremes, while giving birth to the psychological conflict, which is the expertise of the author. Furthermore, the character who represents the Freudian psychoanalytical concepts in addition to another character in the opposing position, who represents the archetypal psychology¹²⁾ of Jung, described with Jungian concept of collective unconscious, appears in the scene.¹³⁾

However, in *Dynamo*, the psychological journey from Freud to Jung is not clearly defined due to the enigmatic equivocacy of the characterization. In other words, the characters possess both the Freudian and Jungian traits. However, these two properties seemingly result in the conflict within these personalities.

Ambiguity can be seen in the main character, John Loving, from the scene where he explains his plot to write the novel describing his philosophical travails.¹⁴⁾

First of all, his exploration begins with Christianity and ends in Christianity. During the cycle of philosophical transitions, through the confrontation between John and Loving (with mask), the author tried to reveal the self-contradiction within the character.

Secondly, the main character tries to dramatize his conflict between Christianity and love (but eventually he decides to return to Christianity as a result of his confrontation), and the different types of love (that people feels differently) in his novel.

Finally, he confronts his parents' deaths despite of the recovery of his belief which evolves his repudiation of Christian faith. Self-

contradiction leads to his return to Christianity but in the event of his parents' deaths, he loses his faith in Catholics. In other words, the dual layered structure of his paradoxical self-contradiction results in the split of his character into John and Loving, which symbolizes the internal conflict.

The ambiguity of the inter-relationship between the characters in *Dynamo* and *Days Without End* in contrast with the clarity found in *Ah, Wilderness!* is quite evident from the lines of the characters in *Ah, Wilderness!*

When we compare Miller and Light, the father of Reuben, in *Dynamo*, the clarity of the play is obvious. Light, who is a reverend, represents Puritanism but there is a scene where he shows his other side that reveals the Freudian part of the character in the following lines:

Light

I must be honest with myself ... who am I to cast the first stone at Reuben if he desires a woman? ... hasn't my love for Amelia been one long desire of the senses? ... I should understand Reuben's weakness and forgive him...

Dynamo Act One Scene Three

On the contrary, Miller is described as a rigid Puritan. He is a simple stubborn person and does not have a complex personality (ambiguous) like Light in *Dynamo*. Next lines also shows his plain and perspicuous character. In Act One, Richard angrily mentions, "The Fourth of July is a stupid farce!"¹⁵⁾ To these words, Miller demanding counters in a strict manner:

Miller

Hmm. Them are mighty strong words. You'd better not repeat such sentiments outside the bosom of the family or they'll have you in jail.

Ah, Wilderness! Act One

Mrs. Miller also worries about the radical books Richard reads:

Mrs. Miller

Well, no matter how, there they were on his shelf. Two by that awful Oscar Wilde they put in jail for heaven knows what wickedness.

Ah, Wilderness! Act One

II-i Comedic Expression of Tragedy in the Deep Layer of Personal Unconscious

Ambiguity and complexity of the characters in *Dynamo* can be evidenced from the ambivalent character of Reuben who has multitude of elements such as Puritanism and materialism as well as Freudian and Jungian features. On top of these factors, his spiritual transition, shifting from worshipping *Dynamo* to the real god, add to the complication of the character. In the process of establishing his faith in the real god, Oedipus complex evolves in him which triggers self-contradiction that tortures him to commit suicide. In other words, Reuben's tragedy is born from the conflict of his sexual libido deep rooted in his personal unconscious and the psychological libido of his collective unconscious which in turn results in triggering the self-contradiction.

In *Days Without End*, self-contradiction evolves in Lucy. Her self-contradiction is described from psychoanalytical viewpoint. Elsa, on the other hand, is illustrated in contrast to Lucy as the extreme of the other end. To the Freudian rebel character of Lucy, Elsa mentions in the next lines that she is able to retain her true self by controlling her unconscious or reaction.

Elsa

All that saved me from doing something stupid was the faith I had that somewhere the man was waiting whom I could really love. I felt I owed it to him and to my own self-respect not to deliberately disfigure myself out of wounded pride and spite.

Days Without End Act Two

Elsa is able to establish herself through the marriage in contrast to Lucy who blames herself for having an affair with John and her guilty conscious triggers the Freudian neurosis.

Lucy

Only my morbidness. I've been accused of so many rotten things I never did that I suppose I'm hipped on the subject.

Days Without End Act Two

The main theme of *Days Without End* focuses on the main character, John Loving's split personalities and the conflict that occurs between them. The confrontation represents the clash between the conscious and personal unconscious (Freudian concept). The conflict mainly results from the tragic consequences of self-contradiction in religious belief and love of John Loving.

Next lines of Loving reveals his urge for love at the same time as the hatred towards love, which represents Jungian split personality, which, as a result, tries to free himself from internal conflict by alleviating the internal confrontation through self-adjustment but he fails.

Loving

That is, he saw clearly that this situation was the climax of a long death struggle between his wife and him. The woman with him counted only as a means. He saw that underneath all his hypocritical pretenses he really hated love. He wanted to deliver himself from its power and be free again. He wanted to kill it!

Days Without End Act Three Scene One

The controversial views on religion within the character results in the self-contraction where one character criticizes Christ on one hand but relies on the other. Loving defies John's religious creed which detonates the conflict between them resulting in a severe symptom of character split. At the end, when the conflict peaks the top, Loving recognizes the defeat. "Thou hast conquered, Lord.

Thou art -- the End. Forgive -- the damned soul -- of John Loving!" and falls down and dies,¹⁶⁾ the fusion of John and Loving into one personality or the unification of the split characters.

John

No! I bless! I love!

Loving

No!

John

Yes! I see now! At last I see! I have always loved! O Lord of Love, forgive Thy poor blind fool!

Loving

No!

John

Thou art the Way—the Truth—the Resurrection and the Life, and he that believeth in Thy Love, his love shall never die!

Loving

Thou hast conquered, Lord. Thou art—the End. Forgive—the damned soul—of John Loving!

Days Without End Act Four Scene Two

In *Dynamo*, the author described the tragic path from the self-contradiction to the personality split resulting in the suicide of the main character, Reuben. However, in *Days Without End*, the tragic element of self-contradiction which provokes the self-denial leading to the split of the character that eventually results in the process of self-adjustment. In light of the author's genius as a playwright, *Ah, Wilderness!* played a vital role in the evolution of the plot of *Days Without End* that John Loving realizes the self-adjustment.

I would like to prove this by analyzing the layer of personal unconscious of each character in *Ah, Wilderness!* The most complex

character described in the play is Sid. Sid is Mrs. Miller's brother. He is described as a cheerful clown, humorous and jovial person, in the age of 45, short with a look of permanent child, bald-headed and fat. He resembles pale skinned naughty boy in "Peck's Bad Boy" by George W. Peck (American politician and journalist), the character who cannot be adult with playful looks. He dresses in clothes that were once gaudy, flamboyant and loud but are now shabby, untidy and shapeless with unmatched colors. He is always amusing and with full of jokes but has a dark tragic element suppressed inside his character. This is the evident in the next lines of Mrs. Miller.

Mrs. Miller

Sid, you're a caution. You turn everything into a joke.

Ah, Wilderness! Act One

The negativity in Sid comes from the unsuccessful love affair with Lily. His sadness is accumulated inside his heart.

In the next lines, Sid reads out the lines of decadent Oscar Wilde's poem purposely in a loud voice with emphasis and humor when the father of Murier angrily stormed into the Miller's in a rage, complaining on the Richard's love letter to his daughter citing the poem and renouncing the relationship of the young lovers.

Sid

"My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes

Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs

Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound--"

Ah, Wilderness! Act One

This is the scene where the complexity of Sid appears. It is quite evident from his reaction that his sexual urge and psychic energy of libido arises and these two contradictory factors cross. In spite of his situation, he points out the good things about Waterbury with the sense of humor, trying to distract the others' attention.

Sid

Waterbury's a nifty old town with the lid off, when you get to know the ropes. I rang in a joke in one of my stories that tickled the folks there pink. Waterwagon—Waterbury—Waterloo! I thought it was pretty fair myself Yes, you can see life in Waterbury, all right—that is, if you're looking for life in Waterbury!

Ah, Wilderness! Act One

II-ii Comedic Expression of Tragedy in the Layer of Collective Unconscious

In Carl Jung's term, the collective unconscious refers to the spiritual heritage of each individual and is not what is developed in each human being. Tribalism, nationalism and racism pervade the collective unconscious such as family (husband and wife/siblings), tribal nation and ethnic groups. In *Ah, Wilderness!*, three groups can be evidenced when applying Jung's concept: Mr. and Mrs. Miller; Richard and his lover, Murier; Sid and Lily as well as the people surrounding them. The tragic elements in the collective unconscious of these groups are expressed humorously in the comedic conversation.

In the play, these three couples appear in the scenes as the young lovers, drunker and his lover who loves him but unable to accept his love due to his feeble conduct, and aged couple of Mr. and Mrs. Miller. The conflicts that exist in the relationship between the parties are resolved as the story progresses. On the surface, their relationships are described as a warmhearted family comedy. However, deep in their collective unconscious layer, the tragic elements of conflicts which evolve from self-contradiction and self-denial are hidden at the abyss of the play. The consequences of these adversities are expressed with comedic action and dialogues.

To elaborate the above point, I would like to take the relationship of Sid and Lily. In the next scene, Sid asks Lily to the beach.

Sid

Lily, want to come with me to the fireworks display at the beach tonight?

Lily

I—I'd like to, Sid, thank you. Only not if you come home—you know.

Sid

Evil-minded, I'm afraid, Nat. I hate to say it of your sister.

Arthur.

Listen, Uncle Sid. Don't let me catch you and Aunt Lily spooning on a bench tonight—or it'll be my duty to call a cop!

Ah, Wilderness! Act One

In the collective unconscious layers of the couple, sexual urges as well as psychotic elements exist. Arthur senses this and voices out Sid's underlying emotions. He expresses the conflicts in Lily and Sid with wit and humor.

In Act Three Scene Two, Sid turns to drinking when he cannot satisfy his sexual desires, blaming himself of not being able to control himself, crying and pleading Lily for forgiving him. Lily, who cannot hold back her affection towards him, hugs Sid and kisses on his head and forgives him.

Sid

I'm a dirty, rotten drunk!—no good to myself or anybody else! —if I had any guts I'd kill myself, and good riddance! —but I haven't! —I'm yellow, too! —a yellow, drunken bum!

Lily

There! Don't cry, Sid! I can't bear it! Of course, I forgive you! Haven't I always forgiven you? I know you're not to blame—So don't, Sid!

Sid

Thanks, Lily. I can't tell you —

Ah, Wilderness! Act Three Scene Two

O'Neill intelligently described the tragedy of Sid who may have committed suicide when his self-denial is at peak with comedic expression which was only possible with the forgiving words of Lily enabling Sid to overcome the conflict and self-denial through self-adjustment.

Next example is Richard and Murier. Broken-hearted, Richard allows him to be lured by his friend and turns to drinking and dating with prostitute, returns home fully drunk. Mildred delivers a note from Murier telling that she has been forced by his father to write a breakup letter which is not her intention and to meet her tonight at the beach. Although he is not allowed by his mother to go out of the house, he sneaks out to the beach to meet his lover in high spirit, the reunion of the young lovers.

Richard

Hell is the only word that can describe it. And on top of that, to torture me more, he gave me your letter. After I'd read that I didn't want to live any more. Life seemed like a tragic farce.

Muriel

I'm so awful sorry, Dick—honest I am! But you might have known I'd never write that unless—

Richard

I did, too! If there'd been one of Hedda Gabler's pistols around, you'd have seen if I wouldn't have done it beautifully! I thought, when I'm dead, she'll be sorry she ruined my life!

Muriel

If you ever had! I'd have died, too! Honest, I would!

Ah, Wilderness! Act Four Scene Two

Here, too, Richard expresses the self-denial after reading the letter from Murier, saying that he did not want to live any more and that life seemed like a tragic farce.¹⁷⁾ But after talking with Murier, he is able to resolve his problem, which represents the overcoming of conflict with the harmonious resolution.

The last example is Mr. and Mrs. Miller. Their relationship can be best described in the poem recited by Mr. Miller at the end of the play. The poem is filled with warm-hearted and benevolent love and kindness with seasonal words of sweet, tender and caring affections.

Miller

Well, Spring isn't everything, is it, Essie? There's a lot to be said for Autumn. That's got beauty, too. And Winter—if you're together.

Ah, Wilderness! Act Four Scene Three

Is this final scene just an ordinary heartfelt love comedy? No! Definitely, not! The depth of this play can only be understood by using the same approach which I applied to analyze other works of Eugene O'Neill. In this respect, the seasonal cycle represented in the poem can be viewed as the life cycle¹⁸⁾ of a man. In other words, the love of a young couple, the love of a middle-aged and the love of an aged partner with each group having radiance and darkness, light and shadow hidden at the abyss of the collective conscious of these lovers. A lover represents a family or the most basic society or the smallest social group of human being, each having the conflict within himself/herself. In other words, the tragedy that results from a conflict between positive and negative or light and darkness is expressed humorously in the form of comedy.

II-iii Comedic Expression of Tragedy in Super Conscious Layer

In Act One, Mrs. Miller is concerned about Richard reading aw-

ful books (in her view), the scene where Sid and Lily joins with the family, Sid singing obscene, nasty love song. Lily seems to be distracted with her thinking and does not listen to his song. She starts to recite with compassion the song of lost love passionately with emotions. Richard, on the other hand, recites his most favorite poem:

Richard

“A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, A Loaf of Bread-- and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness--”

Ah, Wilderness! Act One

The word, “Wilderness”, in the poem images the wilderness and desert in *Beyond Good and Evil* written by the great philosopher, Nietzsche:

In the writings of a hermit we always hear something of the echo of desolation, something of the whispers and the timid gazing around of isolation; from his strongest words, even from his screaming, still resounds a new and dangerous kind of silence, of concealment. Whoever has sat down, year in and year out, day and night, alone in an intimate dispute and conversation with his soul, whoever has become a cave bear or digger for treasure or guardian of treasure and dragon in his own cavern — it can be a labyrinth but also a gold mine — such a man’s very ideas finally take on a distinct twilight colouring and smell as much of mould as they do of profundity, something incommunicable and reluctant, which blows cold wind over everyone passing by. The hermit does not believe that a philosopher — assuming that a philosopher has always first been a hermit — has ever expressed his real and final opinion in his books. Don’t people write books expressly to hide what they have stored inside them? — In fact, he will have doubts whether a philosopher could generally have “real and final” opinions, whether in his case behind every cave there does not still lie,

and must lie, an even deeper cavern — a more comprehensive, stranger, richer world beyond the surface, an abyss behind every reason, under every “foundation.” Every philosophy is a foreground-philosophy — that is the judgment of a hermit: “There is something arbitrary about the fact that he remained here, looked back, looked around, that at this point he set his shovel aside and did not dig more deeply — there is also something suspicious about it.” Every philosophy also hides a philosophy; every opinion is also a hiding place, every word is also a mask.

– --*Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil*, Part 9, aphorism 289¹⁹

The poem recited by Sid, Lily and Mrs. Miller are the romantic poetry that expresses love and sufferings, despair and sadness. Richard, on the other hand, expresses the tragedy that exists in the super conscious layer unlike the non – tragic expression of the poems read by these characters. Super conscious layer enables the collaboration of deep psychological tragedy and comedic expression as signified with the word, “Wilderness.”

Most critics view *Ah Wilderness!* as “a comedy”, “a combination of comedy and tragedy” or a comedy built on the ground of tragedy.” I argue, however, that the play does not fall in any of these categories. The play is not just about the comedic expression or tragic expression. It is the fusion of comedy and tragedy.

Conclusion

Ah, Wilderness! plays the significant role in O’Neill’s works as evident from the above analysis. Considering the number of years he had spent in completing the trilogy, his tireless devotion and dedication enabled him to finalize the three plays starting from *Dynamo*.

In Dynamo, Reuben, at the end of the play, finally finds the real

god but he is unable to reach the true object of worship resulting in self-split and self-denial. Eugene O'Neill's struggle to complete the trilogy began from tackling the theme of "science vs god or philosophical conceptualism" and his self-sacrifice enabled him to finalize the *Days Without End*. He allowed the main character to live by overcoming the personality split (fusion of John and Loving). From this conclusion, the author's intent can well be drawn that he tried to express that a life is the manifestation of an eternal life. The ending with John Loving's success was only possible in light of the play, *Ah, Wilderness!* We can say that the author's efforts exerted in writing the three plays (trilogy) finally comes to the grand finale.

Throughout his career as a playwright, O'Neill's main concern was to focus the eyes of the audience on the inner psychological attributes of the characters. His urge did not come from his experience of the melodramatic plays he used to see when accompanying his father, James O'Neill. Considering his outstanding skill and genius talent as seen in his works, I suspect Eugene O'Neill's dilemma and frustration against the American drama written and played during late 19th and early 20th century. He, probably, was not able to tolerate the theatrical trend during his age. This, in turn, motivated him to cultivate his talent as a playwright and enabled him to show the surgical procedure of a human psyche on the stage using the tools called "play" through the human relationships while accepting the transcending and universal existence beyond human life.

The author, on the surface, described the family relationship in the form of a heartfelt family comedy, but *Ah, Wilderness!* is not just a mere combination of comedy and tragedy. O'Neill had skillfully designed the plot to develop interpersonal relationship in three-dimensional structure with vertical pillars using the expressionism technique. Therefore, the exterior part is painted with comedic expression, however, at the depth lies human tragedy which is dormant in each of the characters. In this sense, this is one of the most complex plays of Eugene O'Neill.

The play is easy-to-understand as it may appear, written in simple comedy touch but the intrinsic value of tragic psychological layers are woven in complicated web structure but expressed humor-

ously. In other words, the author tried to express super conscious that resides deep inside human psyche with the use of tragic psychological layers hidden at the abyss of the characters' inner minds. The manifolds of these elements in the play makes it difficult to see the nature and intent of the author but as mentioned in the above paragraph, the true meaning of the play is deeply rooted in the plot of *Ah, Wilderness!*

Notes

- 1) B.H.Clark, *Eugene O'Neill*, (New York, 1947), p.137; Croswell Bowen, *The Black Irishman* (1946). Reprinted in *O'Neill and his Plays*, ed., Oscar Cargill, et al. (New York Univ., 1961), p. 79; John Raleigh, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (Southern Illinois Univ., 1956), p.138, etc.
- 2) Jordon Y. Miller, *Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic* (London, 1962), pp.299-306
- 3) Brooks Atkinson, "Ah, Wilderness!" in *Playwright's progress: O'Neill and the Critics* by Jordan Y. Miller (ed) (Scott, Foresman and Company) p.74
- 4) *Ibid.*, p.75
- 5) 戸谷陽子、アメリカ演劇 5, 古き良きアメリカー『ああ、荒野!』におけるノスタルジーの接点, 全国アメリカ演劇研究者会議, 1991, p. 45
- 6) 山本澄子, 立正大学文学部論叢第103号, E・オニールと『ああ、荒野!』1996, P. 11
- 7) 山内邦臣, 『ユージン・オニール研究』山口書店, 1996, p. 222
- 8) 橋本一仁, 徳島大学学芸紀要第26巻, ユージン・オニール劇における喜劇性—*Ah, Wilderness!*を中心に—, 1975, p. 30
- 9) Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension* (Rutgers U. P., 1959), pp.150-152
- 10) 大野久美, 英語英文学研究第45号, 『ダイナモ』の曖昧性と複雑性, 創価大学英文学会, 1999
- 11) *Ibid.*, p.66
- 12) Carl G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung, Vol.XI, Psychology and Religion* ed. by Herbert Read et al. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1958), p.345
- 13) *Ibid.*, p.345
- 14) 大野久美, 専修人文論集第68号, *Days Without End*—ライフサイクルの永遠性と断絶性—専修大学学会, 専修大学出版局, 2001, p. 240
- 15) Eugene O'Neill, *Ah Wilderness!* (The Library of America, 1988), *Eugene O'Neill: Complete Plays 1932-1943* p.13
- 16) Eugene O'Neill, *Days Without End* (The Library of America, 1988), *Eugene O'Neill:*

Complete Plays 1932-1943 p.179

- 17) Eugene O'Neill, *op.cit.*, p.91
- 18) C.G.Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung, Vol. XIII, Alchemical Studies*, ed. Herbert Read et al. pp.21-28 (life cycle の元型を示している)
- 19) 三島憲一, 『ニーチェ』, 岩波新書, 1987, p.10

・ All the quotes (lines) used in this thesis are cited from *Ah, Wilderness!*, compiled in O'Neill: *Complete Plays 1932-1943* (The Library of America, 1988).